

**Testimony in Support of House Bill 5190**  
**AN ACT CONCERNING TESTING FOR HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS**

By Nilda Fernandez

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To the distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

I respectfully submit the following testimony in support of H.B. 5190, *An Act Concerning Testing for Human Immunodeficiency Virus*. I am a social worker serving in the capacity of medical case manager with the UConn Health/CT Children's Pediatric, Youth and Family HIV Program in Hartford, CT.

I work in the Department of Infectious Diseases providing direct psychosocial support services to infants, children and youth living with HIV disease. I have worked in the field of HIV/AIDS since 1997 as a medical case manager, an advocate, a community organizer, and as prevention supervisor overseeing prevention initiatives including routine HIV Testing efforts. Part of my work includes collaborating with community-based organizations and engaging with the community to help raise awareness and provide preventive education including HIV testing and PrEP navigation services information to individuals and youth in their community, particularly in vulnerable communities that have historically been gravely impacted by HIV disease.

I believe the proposed bill is important because it will help to improve the quality of life and even save lives especially the lives of youth in CT. Most youth tend not to seek medical care unless they experience pain or an injury; furthermore, data illustrates that youth from urban settings utilize the emergency room as their primary medical facility. Implementing universal testing in medical settings including emergency rooms is imperative to ensure youth have equitable access to HIV testing and linkage to medical care/treatment including Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP). Universal HIV testing, will also decrease the number of youth who test as "late testers" with high virology and highly infectious. With the advancement of scientific research, if caught early in the disease (HIV), can be managed and controlled reducing morbidity and mortality from HIV disease. Hence, screening is critical. CT was a leader in establishing HIV routine testing for women during pregnancy. Consequently, this legislation in addition to scientific advances, greatly contributed to the reduction of children born with HIV in CT. This is the time to pass HB 5190 to ensure youth at higher risk of contracting HIV are aware of their status through routine HIV screenings.

I have unfortunately witnessed how the HIV epidemic has gravely affected and curtailed the lives of too many babies, children and youth. I have attended one too many funerals and burials of "warriors" infants, children, youth and women who bravely fought to survive HIV disease. I will never forget:

- The 2 year old being held (rocking) and by his grandmother as she sang lullabies until he took his last breath into the spirit world or,
- The family I worked with where both the mother and youngest daughter both lived with HIV. They were born on the same day and 17 years later passed on the same day of HIV disease, or

Testimony in Support of H.B. 5190

3/7/2022

- The numerous adolescents, who were born with HIV disease and were orphaned in their early years and eventually lost their battles (before routine testing was made available to pregnant women).

I strongly support H.B. 5190 and I urge you to vote favorably for this important bill. Routine HIV testing is an important tool that can help end an epidemic that has been with us for forty years, taken tens of thousands Connecticut lives and added stigma to already marginalized persons. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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